

Message Text

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NODIS

PASS TO WHITE HOUSE FOR BRZEZINSKI

STATE FOR VANCE

FROM AARON

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, ET, SO, US
SUBJ: MEETING WITH MENGISTU

1. I HAD TWO-AND-ONE-HALF HOUR MEETING WITH MENGISTU AFTERNOON 17 FEBRUARY WITH FOREIGN MINISTER FELLEKE, PMAC FOREIGN RELATIONS CHIEF BERHANU BAYEHN FOREIGN MINISTRY PERMSEC DAWIT AND AMERICAN DESK CHIEF BERHANE PRESENT ON ETHIOPIAN SIDE. NONE OF DIRG MEMBERS CURRENTLY CONSIDERED AS HARDLINERS PRESENT. MOOD OF MEETING WAS TEMPERATE AND SERIOUS WITH RECOGNITION ON ETHIOPIAN SIDE OF ITS HIGH-LEVEL NATURE AND EXPRESSIONS OF APPRECIATION FOR PRESIDENT CARTER'S INITIATIVE. MUCH OF THE GROUND COVERED WAS AS ANTICIPATED ON BOTH SIDES. ETHIOPIAN CRITICISMS OF U.S. PAST POSITION TOWARD REVOLUTION WERE EXTENSIVE BUT FAMILIAR AND NOT PARTICULARLY VINDICTIVE IN TONE. MY RESPONSES WERE DIRECT AS PLANNED. THE CONCLUDING PORTION OF THE MEETING WAS CLEARLY UPBEAT AND POSITIVE.

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2. MAIN HIGHLIGHTS: MENGISTU ASKED THAT I PERSONALLY CONVEY TO PRESIDENT HIS ASSURANCES THAT ETHIOPIA HAS NO INTENTION OF CROSSING SOMALIA'S BORDERS, NOR HAS ETHIOPIA ANY INTENTION OF INTERFERING IN OTHER COUNTRIES' AFFAIRS, THAT CUBAN AND SOVIET FORCES HAD COME ONLY TO HELP ETHIOPIA AND ETHIOPIA WOULD NOT PERMIT THEM TO USE ETHIOPIA AS A BASE FOR INTERVENTION IN NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES.

3. IN RESPONSE TO MY STRONG CHARACTERIZATION OF DESTABILIZ-
ING EFFECT OF CUBAN AND SOVIET COMBAT FORCES REMAINING IN
REGION AND MY STRESS ON FACT THAT THIS CAUSED DEEP CONCERN
TO US AND OTHER COUNTRIES OF THE AREA, HE SAID HE UNDER-
STOOD THIS CONCERN AND WISHED TO REASSURE US THAT ETHIOPIA
DID NOT REGARD THESE FORCES AS A PERMANENT FEATURE OF THE
AREA, BUT AS TEMPORARY THOUGH NECESSARY FORCES TO ENABLE
ETHIOPIA TO OVERCOME THE EFFECTS OF SOMALI AGGRESSION.
MENGISTU'S PURPOSE WAS CLEARLY NOT TO FURTHER STRAIN RELA-
TIONS BUT TO KEEP OPEN CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION AND TO
BALANCE SOVIETS TO SOME EXTENT. KEY AT THIS POINT IS CLEARLY
TO GET SOMALIS OUT OF OGADEN. OTHERWISE MENGISTU DETERMINED
TO PUSH THEM OUT DESPITE RISKS OF WIDER CONFLICT. HE APPREC-
IATED CLARIFICATION THAT OUR APPROACH IS CEASEFIRE LINKED
WITH WITHDRAWAL AND NEGOTIATION AIMED NOT AT LEAVING
SOMALI FORCES IN PLACE BUT AT STABILIZING SITUATION AFTER
WITHDRAWAL. FROM HIS REACTIONS, THERE MAY BE SOME POSSIBILITY
OF NEGOTIATION ALONG THESE LINES.

4. PRIOR TO DEPARTURE TOMORROW, I WILL MEET WITH FOREIGN
MINISTER AND VISIT FORMER AID PROJECT (JFK LIBRARY) AS
WELL AS RURAL DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION.
MATHERON

SECRET

NNN

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